

February 28th, 2023
ila duncan
Resource Generation CT & Recovery For All
Before the Housing Committee

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:
My name is ila duncan and I live in Wilton with my parents who own our home. **I am testifying in support of a rent cap and in support of SB 4, with changes to better protect tenants.**

I'm a member leader of the Connecticut chapter of Resource Generation. We organize young people (ages 18-35) with wealth and class privilege to equitably redistribute land, wealth and power. We belong to Recovery For All – a statewide coalition fighting for a better future for Connecticut, bringing together more than 60 community, faith, and labor organizations.

I grew up in Wilton and moved back in with my family during COVID after 7 years of renting in New York City. Because my family has wealth, I have never experienced housing insecurity. I have always had the option of living with my parents, and choosing that option for the last 3 years has given me full control over my work life since I haven't had to worry about paying rent. I have this opportunity through the pure luck of the family I was born into.

I see the toll that housing insecurity takes on my friends and others around me, those who work harder and give more to their communities than I do. Having access to wealth frees me from the stresses and consequences of housing insecurity, but experiencing housing insecurity traps people in a spiral of stress, fees and marks on their record that make it harder and harder to find and keep housing. I think the narrative is often that people experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity “deserve” it. **But what have I done to “deserve” secure housing?**

What I experience on an individual level is reflective of the larger inequities in our state. The richest 5 percent of households have average incomes 14.1 times as large as the bottom 20 percent of households. [EPI] Since the start of the pandemic, Connecticut's 12 billionaires have seized more than \$15 billion in additional wealth. That's more than \$1 billion apiece. Together, these 12 billionaires are worth a combined total of \$75 billion. [Internal Analysis] **Wealth generates wealth while poverty punishes with more poverty.**

Meanwhile, over the last two decades through the five-year period of 2017-2021, median rents increased in Connecticut nearly twice as much as the income of renters. If adjusted for inflation, the median household income of renters actually *dropped* by 13%. Median rent has spiked further in the state over the last two years, increasing by 20%. Skyrocketing rent is driving homelessness, increasing evictions—now higher than pre-pandemic averages—and displacing families from their homes.

A rent cap is one small but concrete step we can take towards ending this cycle and closing our massive wealth gap. According to the Urban Institute, over 180 jurisdictions have some form of

rent stabilization. All of those places are still in existence - rent stabilization hasn't destroyed any of them, despite the claims of the real estate lobby who want to ensure that they can raise rents as much as possible. We can build a future where all residents, not just the wealthy few, have the resources they need to survive and thrive. This is the future I want for Connecticut, because as one of the wealthy few I find that my security feels empty when it leaves behind so many in my community.

We must prioritize the wellbeing of tenants, so that every single person in our state has the safety of housing stability. I strongly support a rent cap, but SB 4 would be stronger with the following changes:

- **The cap should be lower—I suggest 2.5 or 3%.** This tracks pre-pandemic average rent increases and would be affordable and predictable to tenants.
- **It should cover apartments in between tenants** so landlords can't push out tenants to increase the rent.
- **It should expand good cause eviction protections** to cover all tenants so they have greater stability in their homes.

Thank you.

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